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Current Opinion.

The Historical Basis of Old Testament Ideas.

In the preface to his *Politics and Religion in Ancient Israel*, J. C. Todd thus emphasizes the importance of a knowledge of Hebrew history: It is sometimes said, Let us confine ourselves to the spiritual and moral lessons of the Bible, and let us leave on one side the historical aspect. But to do so—even if it were possible—would be to ignore the unique value of Holy Scripture. It is not a formal treatise on religion and ethics; it is the record of the lives and thoughts of men. It is just because the lessons are given in this concrete form that they are superlatively valuable: this is the reason why they have never been supplanted, and never can be supplanted in the future. The problem before us at the present day is to restate the history in the light of modern research. We must not attempt to trace the “evolution of dogma” as if it were a separate entity. The beliefs of a nation are one aspect of a complex whole. It is, indeed, a platitude to say that in the ancient world politics and religion are two sides of the same thing, but this platitude must be applied as rigorously in Israel as elsewhere. The developed religion of Israel is one of the foundations of the modern world; it is the gift which the western Semites have bestowed on all succeeding generations. But to understand it we must see it in the making, as one aspect of a developing unity—the nation as a whole.

The Inspiration of the Bible.

Dealing with the subject of the inspiration of the Scriptures, Professor Marcus Dods in his recent Bross lectures said: Without professing to define inspiration, it seems safe to affirm one or two elements which enter into it and must be included in any definition. The first affirmation which may safely be made regarding inspiration is that it signifies the presence and influence of the Divine Spirit. The Spirit of God may truly be said to be present and energetic everywhere, but the same result of this presence is not everywhere apparent. The writers of Scripture are designated “inspired,” not as if they alone possessed the Spirit of God, but because in them that Spirit is working as the Spirit of Christ, and they are by him being led into a full knowledge of the truth that is in Christ; and when some of their number are characterized as “inspired,” this means that these persons are distinguished above their fellow-Christians by a special readiness and

capacity to perceive the meaning of Christ as the revelation of God and to make known what they see. And, in the second place, we may declare that inspiration stands in a vital relation to character. The Spirit of truth promised to the disciples was the spirit of holiness. It was those who were most in sympathy with the purpose of God and were most imbued with the purpose of holiness, who were best prepared to see and recount his revelation. The man who gave himself up to God, and who was emptied of self-seeking and of worldly ways of looking at things, was best fitted to understand what God sought to disclose to men. Such a man became the purest possible medium of the Spirit.

Inspiration is then primarily a spiritual gift, and only secondarily a mental one. Its influence on the mental movements of its subject, however, although indirect, is not slight. It illuminates the mind as enthusiasm does, by stimulating and elevating it; it enriches the memory as love does, by intensifying the interest in a certain object and by making the mind sensitive to its impressions and retentive of them. It brings light to the understanding and wisdom to the spirit, as does purity of intention, or a high aim in life. Occasionally, as in the case of Paul, it seizes upon a man of the largest natural intellect and of rich attainment. But so far as we can gather from the Bible, inspiration does not confer intellectual acuteness where that did not previously exist, nor does it impart superhuman power to know what ordinary inquiry can ascertain. Inspiration enables its possessor to see and apprehend God and his will, and to impart to other men that which he himself has seen and apprehended; but of any further power it confers it is precarious to make assertions.

What is the purpose of the Bible? Its purpose is to exhibit Christ. As our Lord himself defined the Scriptures, "They are they which testify of me." By means of the Scriptures the knowledge of God's saving love in Christ is communicated to the world. In Christ we have the supreme revelation of God, and if Scripture conveys to us a sufficient knowledge of Christ, it accomplishes its purpose. Error is unimportant when it does not affect the purpose of the whole. No errors in Scripture are of importance which do not prevent it from accomplishing God's purpose of preserving for us the knowledge of his revelation in Christ. The Bible's object is to enable us to apprehend God in Christ and lead us to him. This object it has infallibly accomplished. The Christian ages stand behind it with their irrefutable testimony. The Scriptures have infallibly led men to Christ. It would seem that the members of our churches are yet far from understanding that the authentication of Christ cannot be touched by criticism; that he is his own best witness, and that this witness is independent of any doctrine or theory of the inspiration or infallibility of Scripture.